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Legends of Ceylon

By Aline Van Dort.

LEGENDS OF CEYLON

The Prince Of Lanka.

LEGENDS OF CEYLON

IN FAIRY TALES

Eké mat eké rataké
(Once in a Certain Country)

BY

ALINE VAN DORT

COLOMBO:

PLATÉ LTD.

TO

MY LITTLE FRIEND

AND CHILD - CRITIC

ALIÇE MAARTENSZ

FROM HER

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THE PRINCE OF LANKA:

LANKA KUMARAYĀ.

IN a certain far-off country which memory loves to recall, there once lived a great King and gracious Queen. The country they ruled over was so beautiful, that poets sang of its loveliness in all parts of the world.

It was always springtime in Lanka, as this beautiful country was called. Neither the biting cold of winter nor the scorching heat of summer, ever visited the land.

The men were strong and brave, the women kind and gentle, and one and all loved their dear King and Queen.

They had one common sorrow, the King, the Queen, and their people. The Royal Palace was empty of children.

The Queen longed for a baby; the King wanted a son, who would grow tall and strong and brave; the people wanted an heir to the throne.

One day when the Queen was alone in her garden waiting for the King's return, she watched two birds at play.

At least, she thought they were at play, till she discovered that one was a very tiny bird and that the bigger one was teasing it.

The bigger bird pecked at the little bird and chased it all over the Queen's rose garden, till at last the poor

little bird fell exhausted into the basin of a fountain, and would have been drowned had the Queen not rescued it.

Poor little bird, it was very wet and cold, so the Queen tried to dry its feathers with her soft handkerchief.

She was stroking it softly when she heard a tiny voice say:

"Gracious Lady, thank you kindly,
You've saved in sooth a fairy's life;
For your kindness I'll reward you,
For your sweetness I applaud you;
Gracious Lady, thank you kindly."

Imagine the Queen's surprise when she discovered that she held a tiny little bird-fairy in her hand, and that the little fairy had just spoken to her.

How was it she had not noticed that it was a fairy she had rescued?

Underneath the brown bird's wings were the softest pair of white downy fairy wings, and underneath the little bird's head was the sweetest little laughing face that ever fairy possessed, and tucked away behind the brown bird's legs were the daintiest pair of fairy feet.

"Oh! You dear little fairy," exclaimed the Queen, delighted. "You must stay with me always, and be my little daughter! Are you really a fairy? I can hardly believe my eyes!"

"I can prove to you that I am a fairy, gracious Queen, by granting you your dearest wish," said the little bird-fairy, laughing.

And then she grew very grave and told the Queen that it was a cruel witch disguised as a bird that had chased her round the rose-garden. The poor little

fairy trembled with fright when she remembered her wicked tormentor. She would probably have been turned into an ugly old frog in the fountain, had the Queen not saved her from such a fate. But now she felt sure she could fly safely back to fairy-land, for the old witch believed she had been turned into a frog.

And the Queen was to have her dearest wish granted.

I am sure you can guess what it was the Queen wished for.

Not long after this a dear little baby Prince was born in the palace. How the King and Queen rejoiced, and the people all over the country in every town and village, far and near, celebrated the birth of their Prince with feasting and rejoicing and pilgrimages to their temples, to which they took thank-offerings of flowers and jewels, fruit and rice.

All night long the tom-toms beat throughout the island of Lanka.

Near the Royal Palace was a beautiful lake with a stone bund running round it, and that night, and for many nights afterwards, thousands of tiny coconut-oil lamps, placed in the niches on the bund, glittered and cast dancing reflections on the still waters, till the whole place looked like Fairy-land.

The feasting and rejoicing were kept up till the ceremony of presenting at the Temple was performed, to which the good Queen did not forget to invite her little fairy friend the brown-bird fairy.

The tiny brown-bird fairy came to the ceremony, and gave the little baby Prince of Lanka a priceless fairy gift.

It was the greatest of all things anyone could possess.

And it was called Charity.

Days and weeks and months passed by very quickly in the happy land of Lanka.

And the young Prince grew in strength and beauty.

Oh! how his mother and father loved him!

His mother had a beautiful nursery built for him, opening into her dear old rose garden, and here the Prince and his mother spent the happiest hours of their lives.

He was never alone, this happy little Prince, for the King himself accompanied his little son if ever he went beyond the Palace gates.

And all sad or ugly sights were hidden from him; for as the little Prince grew into a sturdy romping little scamp, his parents noticed how all his fun and laughter stopped at the sight of anything sad or ugly.

He would grow very quiet, or, nestling close to his mother or father, would put the strangest of questions.

Soon the Prince grew from boyhood into manhood.

Strong and brave and kind the Prince became, and was loved throughout the land.

He was a strange Prince, however; for he would not go hunting with his father—he thought it cruel to hurt any living creature.

Yet he did not seem to mind very much getting hurt himself.

One day when the King and his son were returning to the Palace, a poor old beggar waylaid them, and, exposing his infirmities, begged for alms.

The Prince gave him all the money he had on his person, and walked sadly back to the Palace with his father.

The King was vexed that this should have happened; for since the birth of the Prince he had hidden all sad sights from him, and he noticed how the memory of the poor beggar-man still troubled the Prince.

To help him to forget the beggar-man the King got up a great tournament.

Feats of extraordinary skill, prowess and valour were performed throughout the week. Princes from all the neighbouring states and countries entering into competition with the Prince of Lanka, who entered as whole-heartedly himself as his father could have wished.

The throwing of korre-pol, or hard coconuts, opened the tournament on the first day, and was won by the Prince of Lanka. The games of unkeliya and pol-keliya and the climbing of the greasy-pole, called kalpa-rukea-galia, were open to all, and rewarded with knighthood or a chieftainship.

On the last day at the close of the tournament in the palace gardens, a Beauty competition was held.

The ladies of the land competed with Princesses and the ladies of other neighbouring lands.

Four Princes were to judge, while the Prince of Lanka was to give the casting vote, and a throatlet of emeralds to the successful competitor.

The beautiful Princess who won the emerald throatlet also won the Prince of Lanka's heart; for she was as good as she was beautiful.

The King was delighted; for he felt sure that in his happiness the Prince would forget the lesson the poor beggar-man had taught him—that there were sin and suffering even in as beautiful a country as Lanka.

Soon the marriage-day was fixed—a lucky-day in which the Prince's star was supposed to shine brightest in the heavens—and in due time the Prince of Lanka married his beautiful Princess.

The Prince, however, had not forgotten the beggar-man.

One day the Prince was not to be found either in the palace or the palace grounds.

They went everywhere in search of him; but he was nowhere to be found.

Days passed by, time lengthened into weeks; but the Prince did not return.

The beautiful Princess, the King and the Queen and the people of Lanka were very sad; for they loved their Prince dearly and longed for his return.

When a great many years had passed by, news was brought one day to the King of a great teacher who was in the land, teaching the people to bear with one another, helping those who suffered.

The King rejoiced at the news. Had he not suffered the loss of a loved son ?

Surely this great teacher would have pity on him, and would perhaps help him to find his son ; for the King felt sure the Prince was not dead.

At last the great teacher came to the palace. There were a great many people who needed help in Lanka, and the teacher had been very busy helping them, so that

he was not able to come to the King immediately the King's message reached him.

In the throne-room they waited for him; the King, the Queen, and the beautiful Princess. The teacher was very poorly dressed, his head was shaved and bare; bare were his hands and feet. He wore no jewels; a clean linen robe was all he was clad in; but when the beautiful Princess saw the teacher she left her throne, and, running up to him, she threw her arms round him and wept for joy.

The great teacher was no other than her long-lost husband, the Prince of Lanka.

You may be sure the King and Queen rejoiced when they recognized their son.

The teacher had indeed helped them to find the Prince of Lanka.

He also taught them to remember the poor and suffering in the land; the poor for whom he had left his home and his happiness for so many years.

And a brighter, wiser rule dawned for Lanka after the great teacher's return than it had ever known before.

KING WIKRAMA AND THE GROTTO GIRL:

WICKRAMA RAJA SAHA GUHAWE ÛN LAMISSI.

IN the town of Gampola, a great many years ago, there lived a young King. He was barely fifteen when his father, the old King, died.

King Wikrama was an athlete, fond of sport, and with a great love of adventure, which took him very often many miles away from his Palace.

One day when his love of adventure had taken him an unusually long distance from Gampola, he came upon the hut of an old hermit. The hermit had built his hut in the most beautiful spot you could imagine.

Palms hid it from view till you were quite near by, and then you suddenly came upon a cadjan hut, whose mud walls were smothered over by close clinging creepers, in full and varied blossom.

The wise old hermit and the young King were soon fast friends, and spent many pleasant hours in each other's company. From the rich store-house of his memory the wise man gave King Wikrama precious lessons dearly bought with sad experience; lessons which helped the young King to govern his kingdom wisely and well.

One fine day King Wikrama confided to his friend the

hermit his great wish to build a beautiful city and to improve and enlarge his domain.

Now the old hermit was a clever magician, though the King did not know it, and when he had heard of the King's ambition he filled a tiny wallet with magic pebbles, and led his friend to a spot not far from his hut, where a stream lay hidden under the branches of a creeping bamboo.

Here he selected from his wallet two round magic pebbles and threw them into the stream. As the stones reached the water a hare rushed past them, followed by a jackal in quick pursuit.

In keen interest the King watched the chase and to his surprise noticed that it was the hare that was pursuing the jackal, not the jackal the hare.

The pursued had become the pursuer.

The old hermit, who had been watching the chase with as great an interest as the King, exclaimed, when he saw how the pursuit went, that that was no doubt the very spot on which King Wikrama should build his temple, and round about it his new city.

The magic stones thrown by the hermit into the stream had turned into a hare and jackal. The hare represented the King and the jackal his future enemies. The pursued turning to give chase to the pursuer, foretold how King Wikrama would eventually overcome his enemies.

King Wikrama was delighted, and lost no time in building a large temple, a palace, and round about them the beautiful city, now known as Kandy.

In due time he left Gampola and lived in his splendid

IN THE GROTTO.

new city. Where the little stream had lain hidden, now there stretched a lovely lake. But King Wikrama was a very lonely young King.

One day his nobles and ministers came to him in a body and begged of him to give them a Queen.

They advised him to go to India in search of a Princess; and he would have done so, but that one day while hunting he wandered into a dense jungle and knew not where he was.

Suddenly he came upon a cool grotto almost completely hidden by tall ferns and formed of huge grey rocks.

A dark-eyed Sinhalese maiden was within the grotto, picking the leaves of a herb which grew there.

The King thought she had quite the prettiest face he had ever seen.

He asked her the way out of the jungle, and she explained it so clearly and prettily that the King, charmed with his little grotto friend, tarried with her yet a while.

She told him that they were on the outskirts of a large forest, not far from Kandy; that she was only a wood-cutter's daughter, and that she lived with her parents in a tiny hut not far from the grotto.

Her parents earned their living by taking wood and herbs for sale into the town.

While they talked, the King's huntsmen, who had been in search of him, approached with shouts and beating of tom-toms.

It frightened the little maiden and she ran away, but not before King Wikrama had made her accept his belt, all studded with rubies and emeralds, as a keepsake. . . . .

The Kandians soon became very sad; their loved King Wikrama had not left his palace for weeks. He neither hunted nor rode, nor seemed to take any interest in his people. He was accustomed to visit the sick in his land; but now they feared he was sick himself.

A clever old Vederala had been sent for, and the people hoped he would be able to cure their King.

The Vederala was no other than King Wikrama's old friend the hermit. And when he had seen the King he ordered that a Pinkama, or procession, should parade all the streets of Kandy, and beyond Kandy into the villages and forests, wherever there was a street, or road, or forest way along which it could pass.

With blowing of horns and beating of tom-toms they were to shout and proclaim to one and all that they were in search of the maid whom the King had chosen for their Queen, and that she was to be found in the person of a little forest maiden who wore a jewelled belt as girdle.

Sixteen elephants were to form part of the procession, and on the largest and oldest of these there was placed a handsome howdah containing cushioned seats strapped to his back.

This was for the Grotto Girl and her father and her mother in which to ride.

They were not very long in finding their Queen-elect, and how surprised the little forest maiden became when she heard that the friend she had met in the grotto was King Wikrama, and that he had not forgotten her, but had sent for her to share his throne with him.

It was a glad, shy little maid that the King came to meet when the procession reached the Palace gates. The old tusker knelt before the King while the little Grotto Girl was helped off the elephant's back by King Wikrama himself.

A splendid wedding was celebrated that day in the city of Kandy.

Of course the young bride, dressed now like a Queen, was the little Grotto Girl, and the groom was happy King Wikrama. There were a great many happy people at the wedding, but few as happy as the wood-cutter, his wife, and King Wikrama's dear friend the old hermit.

Such feasting and rejoicing the world had not seen before, and the people of Kandy never forgot that day.

Those who were born afterwards, heard about it from their parents; they in turn told their children about it; till it came down to me from a very old uncle who lived in Kandy, and now I have given it to you.

THE YOUNGER BROTHER:

MALLIE.

ONCE upon a time there lived a villager and his wife, who had two sons and a daughter.

The elder son was sent to school and his parents thought a lot of him; while the younger son was neglected and received no instruction.

One day the villager called his elder son to him and said:

"You have been many years at school; can you read this letter to me?"

But his son could not read the letter, for he had neglected his lessons and spent all his time in play.

The younger son, however, who had never been sent to school, but who had taught himself with the help of his brother's books and slate, with very little difficulty read the letter to his father.

The letter was from a kind fairy, warning them that a dreadful monster intended to steal away their little daughter.

You may be sure that after this, they took the greatest care of Maniké, as the villager's beautiful daughter was called. In spite of all their care, however, Maniké was stolen away one dark night by the dreadful monster. And her parents were inconsolable.

One day the elder brother went to his mother and said:

"Mother, make me a hamper of rice-cakes, and let me go in search of my sister."

And off he went with the hamper when ready.

Now, after he had trudged for some miles he came upon a great stone placed at the crossing of four roads. On the stone was written the names of the places to which the four roads led, and near to the stone was an Ambalam or Rest-house, and by it a cool *chatty of clear water, at which weary travellers could quench their thirst.

The villager's son entered the Ambalam, and, opening his hamper, ate the rice-cakes his mother had made, quenched his thirst at the chatty of clear water, and laid himself down to sleep.

It was morning before he awoke, and, admitting to himself that his search had been in vain, he journeyed homewards.

He had gone but a little way when he met his younger brother.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, "whither away?"

"Why? In search of our sister, of course," his brother replied.

"And do you expect to find her when I have failed?" the elder brother demanded.

"I'll not return home without Maniké," said the younger brother, and in anger they parted, and went their different ways.

It was not long before the younger brother came to the four cross roads, and read the inscription cut into the great stone that lay there.

* Chatty—Earthen Vessel.

"The road on your immediate right," so ran the inscription, "leads through the three kingdoms of the three wise Kings to the abode of the most wicked and dreadful of monsters the fairy world has ever known."

"My elder brother could not have seen this," thought the younger brother, and he lost no time in taking that road.

It led him through dense forests into the kingdoms of the three wise Kings.

The three wise Kings were brothers, and loved one another dearly.

They each in turn asked the traveller whither he was bound, and learning on what a kind but dangerous mission he was bent, and that a brave heart was about all he took with him to help on his way, they promised to reward him if he met with success, by giving him a beautiful Princess, and an elephant loaded with wealth and jewels, which would keep him rich to the end of his days.

Thanking the three wise Kings for their kindness, the villager's son continued his way.

At last he came upon a great stone building in which a beautiful girl sat weeping alone.

And as he came nearer he recognized her, for she was Maniké, his darling sister.

At first she was overjoyed at seeing him, but presently she trembled at the thought of the wicked monster's return. She felt so sure that the monster would kill her brother and eat him up, that she just begged and implored of her brother to go away.

This her brother pretended to do; but he really hid himself just outside the stone room in which his sister sat.

And while he lay hidden the dreadful monster returned, and, sniffing about his stone house, he accused Maniké of having some one hidden somewhere.

"I smell human flesh," he said, "and I am hungry."

He tramped about the place searching here and there, and fussing and fuming, while Maniké busied herself preparing a meal for him.

"Bah!" he said, "do you think rice cakes will satisfy me when I've smelt human flesh?"

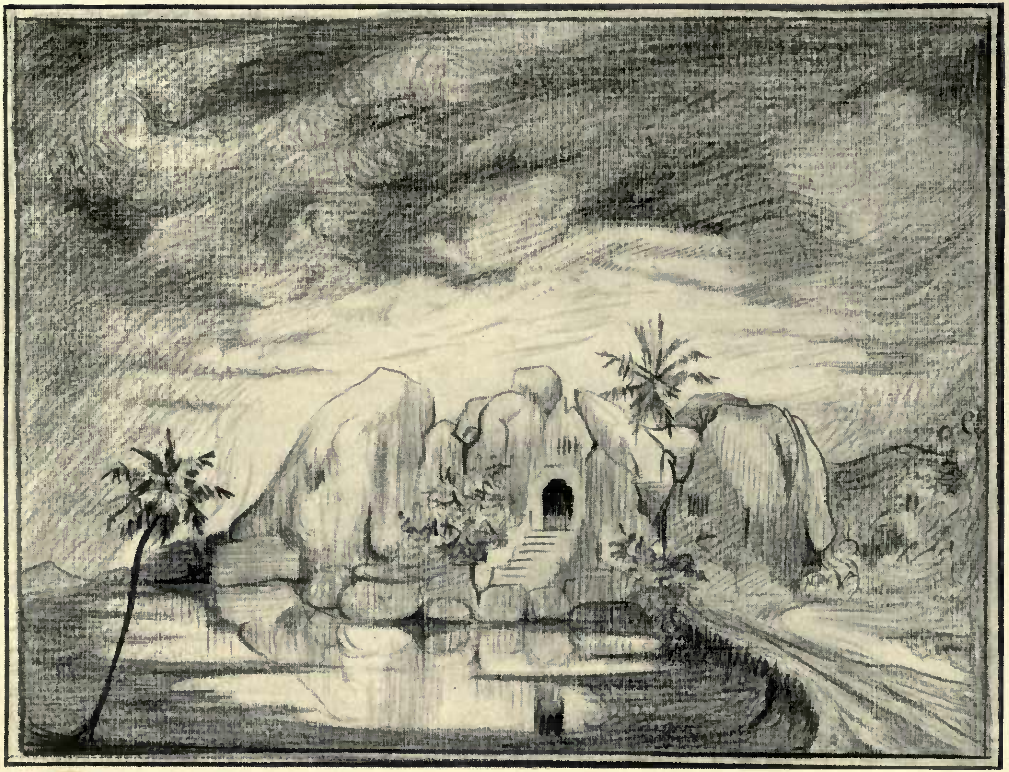
"I shall not rest to-night till I get what I want, and if I don't find it here I shall go out in search of it."

"Are you not frightened of the poisonous snakes, of all the creeping things and of the wild beasts outside?" asked Maniké. "Won't you wait till the morning dawns?"

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed the dreadful monster, "you don't know that I have a charmed life. Nothing can possibly harm me as long as my spirit lies hidden in the kernel of a fruit which grows on the top of an *uga-rassé tree, by the shores of the Indigo Sea."

"Crocodiles guard the tree night and day, and it bears just that one fruit. Were mortal to pluck the fruit and throw it into the sea that moment my life would end, but not till then."

* Uga-rassé—Throat Sweet. A small plum coloured fruit, containing four stones. Not unlike a plum in taste.



THE ABODE OF THE WICKED MONSTER.

This was good news to Maniké's brother hiding outside.

Quick as a thought he rushed away, till he came to the Indigo Sea.

There he found the uga rassé tree, and only a few baby crocodiles guarding it.

Their mother had gone in search of food for them, and would soon return.

The villager's son lost no time in climbing the thorny tree, which pricked him as he climbed, but up he had to go, for the fruit grew at the very top.

At last he reached and plucked the fruit, and placing it safely in his belt, down he slowly climbed.

When he reached the bottom he ran down to the sea-shore, and, standing on a rock, he threw the fruit far into the sea. . . .

On his return he found Maniké trying to revive the dreadful monster, who had fallen in a heap on the doorstep of his stone house.

He was dead, of course, and when they had buried him in a great pit they found near by, they left the great stone house, which was really only a huge cave converted by the dreadful monster into a monster dwelling house, and journeyed back to their own dear home.

On the way back they had to pass through the kingdoms of the three wise Kings.

And what a procession they made. There were the three beautiful Princesses, the elephants loaded with riches of all kinds, and there were the Princesses' maids and servant men.

As they neared home their parents heard the tinkling of the elephants' bells long before news reached them that the procession was bringing their own dear children home.

Ah! how happy they were that day! Now, while the younger brother had been searching for his sister, the elder brother had spent his time in digging a great pit. He was far from pleased that his brother had succeeded where he had failed.

"Come and see what I have done," he said. "Brave and successful as you have been, I doubt you could have done as much."

So they all went to the mouth of the pit, the old villager, his wife, their daughter, their sons, and the three beautiful Princesses. And while they looked into the deep pit, which seemed as if it had no bottom to it, the elder brother pushed the younger brother in.

There he lay dead at the bottom of the pit, smashed and bruised, with all his bones broken.

But listen! The daughters of the three wise Kings knew three wonderful secrets.

One could lift at will any weight from any depth, by shutting her eyes and wishing three times.

The second could mend broken bones and heal all bruises by just clapping her hands and wishing three times.

The third knew the most wonderful secret of all. She knew how to give life to anyone who had once possessed it, by placing a kiss lightly on the eyes and lips of the person and wishing with each kiss.

So the three beautiful Princesses, daughters of the three wise Kings, brought the younger brother out of the pit, healed him and gave him life.

And the youngest Princess married him.

The elder brother was sorry for what he had done, so he was forgiven, and they all lived happily ever after.

DINGIRIE MENIKÉ

ONCE upon a time, now almost forgotten, there lived a beautiful little girl named Dingirie. Her father was an officer or chief in the King's army, and Dingirie felt very proud of her father in his gold and white drapery.

She had never seen an English helmet with plumes, such as you think an officer should wear, and to Dingirie her father's pin-cushion hat, crusted with gems, was quite the most splendid part of his costume.

Her mother, to little Dingirie, seemed the most wonderful and the most beautiful woman in the world.

She had a companion and friend, too, who lived next door. He was a big boy, and Dingirie was only a tiny little girl, but he would often play with her and make toys for her; he could not make rag dolls with beady black eyes, such as her mother made her; but he could tell her the most wonderful secrets about the flower fairies, the water fairies, and about all the birds and squirrels in their gardens.

He knew how to tame squirrels, and once he caught a tiny baby squirrel, and gave it to Dingirie to play with.

How you would have loved little Layna, as Dingirie called her pet, if you could have seen its pretty ways. It would run up and down her arms and shoulders, and would eat off her hand. The prettiest sight of all was to watch Layna wash its face.

Some of the happiest hours of Dingirie's life were those she spent with little Layna.

Dingirie's mother taught her to cook and sew and weave, while her father taught her to read and write.

Of her friend, Banda, she saw little now, for he too had his lessons and his work; but he never forgot his old playmate Dingirie.

Years passed by, when one day Dingirie's father returned home very sad, and she noticed that her mother, too, looked troubled, and that her eyes were often red with crying.

"What is it, mother, that troubles you and father so? Tell me, mother, what it is."

"Oh, my little daughter, how can I ever tell you what saddens us so? And yet I must, for it concerns you," her mother answered.

And so Dingirie learnt from her parents that it was a religious duty if, for many years the harvests in the land had been poor, to sacrifice a beautiful young life to the gods to appease them.

And this time they had chosen Dingirie.

Poor little Dingirie was very frightened and sad when her mother told her this. She remembered hearing of other girls who had been selected in past years, and she knew they never came back again.

They would dress her in beautiful bridal clothes, and, decked with richest jewels, she would be conveyed to the top of a very high hill, with a whole procession of men, women and children, elephants, banners and tom-toms.

THE SACRIFICIAL PROCESSION.

Arrived at the top of the hill, with ceremony and the beating of tom-toms, she would be securely tied to a great stake, which had been driven deep into the ground.

And there they would leave her to the Harvest God—leave her alone on the top of the hill till the Harvest God came for her; while the whole procession went down the hill and back to the village.

Poor little Dingirie; she felt she would die of fright if she were left alone on the top of the jungle hill. She was very sad that night, and crept into her mother's room to cry herself to sleep.

Her father did his best to comfort her. He told her not to be frightened; but when Bahira, the Harvest God, came to claim her, she was to sing to him, and giving him all her precious jewels, she was to beg of him to let her return to her parents.

All too soon the dreadful day came round.

Her mother was too sad to go with her in the procession; but her father went with her, and he said he would not leave her till he was obliged.

The time came, however, when he had to leave his little daughter alone.

Alone on the top of a hill, tied to a stake, unable to move hand or foot; and it was so late that it was growing dark.

The sad father lit a great fire not far from the stake to which his dear little daughter was bound, and lingered near her till he was dragged away by his friends.

Dingirie was quite alone. She tried not to be frightened, poor, dear little girl, and she kept her thoughts

busy thinking of what she would say to the Harvest God when he came for her.

After he had cut the cords which bound her, she would fall at his feet and beg for her release. She would beg, too, for a better harvest for her people.

She would give him all her jewels, and promise all she could ever give him, every day as long as she lived.

Oh! how lonely it was on the top of the hill.

What if dreadful wild animals should come and tear her to pieces?

She thought she heard them moving about in the jungle round her.

Oh! what a timid, frightened little girl she was.

What was it her father had told her to do? Ah! he had told her to sing when she felt frightened.

She was too frightened to remember a song, except the songs she had sung as a very little girl to her friend Banda.

What happy days those were, thought the little prisoner.

For every song she sang Banda would sing another.

And her father had told her to sing when she felt frightened waiting for the Harvest God.

So at last little Dingirie sang her old playtime songs, and as she sang song after song the fire went out, and the kind moon appeared and smiled at her.

The moon looked down on Dingirie and seemed so friendly; she could almost imagine it said: "Cheer up! little maid. Cheer up! I'll take care of you."

And then the little fire-flies came—myriads of them—

and flitted about from tree to tree, till Dingirie could imagine she was in Fairy Land. She forgot to be frightened, and went on singing.

Was it her echo she heard away in the distance?

Surely some one was singing! that could not possibly be the echo of her own song!

Why! It sounded like one of Banda's songs—or could it be the Harvest God coming to claim her?

She was not a bit frightened of him now if he could sing like that.

She was sure he would release her. He must be good and kind, she thought, for he sang just as her dear friend, Banda, used to sing.

Ah! He was coming nearer; soon the kind moonlight would show him to her.

She was just a tiny weeny bit frightened, because the voice was very near, so she shut her eyes tight for a little while.

Then the singing stopped. And when she opened her eyes, who do you think she found standing by her?

Guess! Why, it was her dear friend Banda!

And you may be sure he lost no time in cutting the cords which bound Dingirie to the stake.

And what nice things he had brought with him.

He knew his little friend had not had her dinner, so they feasted on the top of the hill.

Banda lit a fire to frighten away the wild animals, and then he sat by the fire and guarded his little friend till morning dawned.

In the early morning they returned to their people in

the village, and told them that the god Bahira had not come all night.

And the people felt sure their sacrifice had not been accepted.

That year, however, the harvest was a good one, and before the harvest was over Banda had married little Dingirie, and had taken her away to his own beautiful home, where they lived happily ever after.

AMAL-BISSO—THE BIRD-CHILD:

KURULLAN ETI KALA LAMAYĀ.

ONCE upon a time a beautiful young woman wandered into a jungle with her little child in search of food. The child was heavy and she was very tired, so she made a soft bed of the petals of flowers, and laid her child upon it.

Then she plucked the thorny branches of a wild creeper growing near by, and built a wall of thorns round her baby to protect it, and covered its wee body with leaves.

While her baby slept she left it in its soft bed and went in search of fruit, for the poor young woman was starving.

Presently two great birds who had no little birdies of their own, found the little human baby in its nest of flowers, and carried it away on their backs to their own nest.

Their nest was very large, and many strange birds lived with them.

There was a Parrot, a Cockatoo, a Myna, a Stork, a King-fisher and a Tailor-bird, forming a happy family.

They were all very kind to the little human child; but none so kind as the two great big birds who had found her and adopted her.

As the little girl grew bigger, she helped the birds build a great bird-house with doors and windows to it.

And there they all lived very happily. Every-body in Bird Land heard of "The House of Many Birds," and the kind little girl who had helped build it.

The birds called their little adopted daughter "Amal-bisso," and they loved her very much.

One day Amal-bisso's foster-parents lit a fire on the hearth of their new house, and asked her to look after it. She was to be sure not to let it go out before their return; for, they were going on a very long journey and would return cold and tired. They would need a nice warm fire before which to dry themselves.

So Amal-bisso promised she would look after the fire; but when the birds had been away some time she fell fast asleep, and the fire went out.

Bye-and-bye she awoke to find only ashes on the hearth, and was so sorry that she began to cry.

The kind Parrot, when he heard her cry, tried to comfort her. "Little girl," he said, "stop crying and I'll tell you what to do. There's no smoke without a fire, they say, and to-day as I flew over the Dragon's house I noticed some smoke coming out of it. Dry up your tears, little girl, and I'll take you to the Dragon's house, and you can ask the Dragon to give you some fire for the hearth."

"I know," added the Parrot, "where we can get some dry sticks, and we shall have a roaring fire before the birds return home."

So off they went to the Dragon's house, the Parrot and the little girl, and knocking at the door, they asked for a lit torch to take home with them.

The Dragon's daughter was at home, and she promised to give them a lit torch if they would first help her in cooking some rice for her father the Dragon, who was away on the rocks by the sea.

And she added, "You must take the rice to my father before you take the torch home."

So the Parrot and the little girl cooked the Dragon's rice for his daughter and started off with it to the rocks by the sea.

The old Dragon was pleased to get the rice, and as he could not see very well he mistook the little girl for his own daughter, or he would surely have eaten her up.

This is what the Dragon's wicked daughter had hoped he would do, but Amal-bisso returned with the Parrot quite safely to the Dragon's home, and once more asked for the lit torch.

"You may have it," said the Dragon's daughter, "and here is some rice for you to eat on the way; but for every grain you put into your mouth, I pray you drop one upon the ground, or some great disaster will befall you."

Secretly she hoped to trace Amal-bisso by the grains of rice dropped on the way.

The Dragon's daughter knew that somewhere, not far away, a great many birds lived together, and she had heard that a little human child lived with them.

"If ever I want a meal I shall be able to go to this House of many Birds and catch one of the birds," thought the Dragon's daughter. "And then there is

the little girl. What a feast she will make when I catch her!"

Amal-bisso did as she was bid, and dropped a grain of rice on the way for every one she put into her mouth, but she first gave some of the rice to the Parrot.

When they reached home they piled the dry sticks upon the hearth, and soon had a great fire blazing to welcome the tired birds home.

Presently they heard a pecking at the door, and the parent birds sang:

"Amal-bisso, Amal-bisso,
Amath ahwa, Apath ahwa
Mahala te muttuth gen-awa.
Dora ara-pang! Dora ara-pang!"

which means:

"Amal-bisso, Amal-bisso,
Your father and your mother
For your throatlet have brought gems.
Open the door! Open the door!"

And Amal-bisso opened the door and let them in; they were wet and tired and cold, but not a bit hungry; for, as they told their little daughter, as they neared home they had found a great many grains of rice strewn on the way, and these they had eaten up.

The next morning off went the birds again, and when they had been gone some little time, Amal-bisso heard a knocking at the door, and some one singing outside:

"Amal-bisso, Amal-bisso,
Amath ahwa, Apath ahwa
Mahala te muttuth gen-awa.
Dora ara-pang! Dora ara-pang!"

The little girl would have opened the door, had not all the birds with one voice sung:

"Amal-bisso, Amal-bisso,
Dora arind eppa,
Amath na-vay, Apath na-vay.
Dora arind eppa."

which means:

"Amal-bisso, Amal-bisso,
Open not the door.
'Tis not your mother,
'Tis not your father.
Open not the door."

So Amal-bisso left the door shut and went on with her work—there was quite a lot to do in keeping the house clean and tidy, and in cooking the food for the day.

Now the Dragon's daughter, who had found the House of Many Birds, and had knocked at the door, singing as she had heard the parent birds sing when they wanted to be let in, was very angry indeed that Amal-bisso did not open the door.

She flew to an old witch who lived in a cave near by, and begged of the old witch to help her do away with Amal-bisso.

The old witch gave the Dragon's daughter a charmed nail, which she told her to place upon the door of the House of Many Birds, in such a way that the nail would be sure to fall on Amal-bisso whenever she opened the door.

Back flew the Dragon's daughter to the House of Many Birds, and cleverly placed the nail upon the outer edge of the ledge above the door. Late in the evening

the birds returned home, and sang to their little human daughter to open the door to them. Amal-bisso ran to the door and opened it to let her dear bird parents in. But in opening the door she shook the nail off the ledge; it struck her on the head and lay hidden in her hair, and Amal-bisso fell down dead.

The birds gathered round her and wept. They had all loved their little girl friend so.

Poor Polly died of a broken heart.

Then the parent birds put Amal-bisso into a golden box-like boat, with her dear friend the Parrot at her feet, and sent the boat afloat along the river.

Down it went, and for a very long way the birds went with it.

As morning dawned the birds had to fly away back to the House of Many Birds, and on went the boat. Away it floated, the golden boat with the little girl and Parrot inside it.

When the sun rose, it glittered and shone till it looked like a boat on fire.

Down to the river that morning a sad lady came to bathe, and with her, her bright-faced maids.

She was always sad, this beautiful lady, though her lord and master was very kind to her.

Folks said that years ago she had lost her little baby in a jungle. A dear little baby girl with a red star upon her left hand.

This morning as she came down to the river with her maids she noticed the golden boat.

It was coming towards them, and the lady swam out

to meet it and with her maids brought it ashore. How surprised she was to find a dear little girl inside the box. Such a pretty little girl, with soft long black hair, and long black curling lashes.

She took Amal-bisso out of the golden boat and hugged and kissed her. She dressed her in soft white silk and combed her long black hair. Hidden in Amal-bisso's hair she found the witch's nail, and directly she removed it the little girl came to life.

Amal-bisso loved the lady with the sad face, who was really Amal-bisso's own dear mother, though Amal-bisso did not know this till her mother discovered a tiny red star on the palm of her left hand.

Amal-bisso lived happily with her mother, but never forgot her kind bird-parents.

They soon discovered she was alive and well, and often visited her, bringing her news of the rest of her friends in the House of Many Birds.

In Amal-bisso's own garden her dear Polly was buried, and she kept its grave fresh with flowers which she grew in her garden for her dear Parrot.

THE RIDDLE PRINCESS:

TERÁVILI KUMĀRI KAVA.

IN a beautiful country called Ceylon, once upon a time there lived a King and his only daughter, who was both his joy and his despair.

His joy, for she was what the King loved most on earth.

His despair, because she would not marry, but spent all her time in solving riddles.

From all parts of the world she had gathered ancient books of riddles. When she was a child she had coaxed her father into building her a high tower, to which was fixed a rope ladder. In the tower she kept her precious books of riddles, and all the toys and playthings of her childhood.

The Princess had hardly known what it was to be loved by a mother when her mother died.

Her books were her friends, and with them she spent most of her time solving riddles.

When she entered her tower she would draw her rope ladder after her, and, undisturbed, give all her mind to her puzzles.

Now the King had a wicked cousin who aspired to the throne, and the King feared that at his death his cousin would rob his daughter of her rights.

He longed that she should marry and have a husband to protect her; besides, in Ceylon at that time it was a

disgrace to be unmarried after a certain age—unless the unmarried person happened to be either a priest or priestess.

The King's chiefs, too, urged the King to arrange a marriage for his daughter with a suitable Prince.

In Ceylon from that time to this day there is the professional matchmaker, and the court matchmaker was anxious to earn his fee.

But what was the King to do when the Princess would not consent to marry?

She would laugh, and tease or coax him into talking of something else each time he broached the subject. One day, however, he determined that she should listen to him, and he showed her that it was a duty she owed her father and her country that she should marry.

And of course the Riddle Princess was obliged to consent.

But she made her conditions, as every woman does when she is obliged to give in, and these were her conditions:—

That she would marry the Prince who would ask her a riddle she failed to solve.

But those who failed in the attempt were to pay for failure with their lives.

The Princess was very beautiful, and the King had a faithful portrait of her painted, which he sent by his favourite courtier all over the wide world.

With her portrait went a scroll of ola-leaf encased in ivory, containing the conditions the Riddle Princess made in consenting to marry.

It was not long before Princes from all parts of the world flocked to Ceylon, for the Princess was enticingly beautiful.

Those who saw her lovely portrait had no peace till they competed for her hand.

And then they found peace only in death, for the Riddle Princess could solve every riddle they put to her.

This is what the Rajah of Rajputana, who reigned over twenty States in India, told his son, when he begged permission to try his luck with the Riddle Princess.

"Would you court death, my son," asked the Rajah, "and at my death let a stranger rule the twenty States over which our ancestors ruled in direct line for countless generations?"

And for a while the Rajah's son did his best to forget the face of the Riddle Princess.

But in his dreams the beautiful face of the portrait haunted him; in her eyes he seemed to read an unsolved riddle; her lips seemed to speak to him. What did they say—that they had the key—the key to what? To the unsolved riddle in her eyes? The key to his happiness?

Ah! he must go, for the Riddle Princess called him in his dreams and his days were restless.

It was only, however, when he had given his father a solemn promise that he would not compete for the Princess's hand that the Rajah consented to his visiting Ceylon, and in parting gave his son three lustrous pearls. So full of light were these pearls that they had been used by the Rajah on special occasions to light up his Palace at night.

Tucking the pearls securely away into the folds of his turban, the Rajah's son left for Ceylon disguised as a poor pilgrim, and when he arrived, sought his way to the Royal Palace.

But first he found the port full of strange vessels from distant lands, and that the whole town was in a stir, the streets crowded with foreigners and natives of the country, all in queer garments which the Rajah's son had never seen before, and talking languages he had never before heard.

No one took much notice of the poor Pilgrim who hung about the palace gates all day.

In the evening he found his way to the Princess's tower, and there he stationed himself at the foot of the rope ladder. At dusk the Princess descended and noticing the poor Pilgrim, asked of him what he wanted. " Food," replied the Pilgrim, " for I am hungry."

"Go," said the Princess to her maids-in-waiting, "bring this Pilgrim good food and plenty of it."

And, she thought to herself, I shall see whether he eats it, for he does not look ill-nourished and I fear he is an impostor. If he eats all I give him I shall be surprised and puzzled.

Meanwhile the Princess mounted her rope ladder to watch the Pilgrim from a tiny window in her tower, from where she could see without being seen. When the food was brought to him, the Rajah's son took out of his turban one of the pearls his father had given him, and placing it on a stone near by, he sat down and made a hearty meal of the excellent food provided.

"Ah," thought he, "I have seen you, my beautiful

Princess, and a million times more beautiful you are than ever artist painted. Full well I know too that you are watching me, and I shall win you, my Princess, or willingly die in the attempt."

When his meal was over the Princess came to him and begged of him to sell her his pearl.

"Beautiful Princess," said the Pilgrim, "my pearl is not for sale, yet you may have it for the asking, on condition you let me kiss your feet.

And off went the Princess with the pearl to shew it to her father the King.

On the morrow the Pilgrim came again, bringing a larger and more lustrous pearl with him, and begged for food as he had done on the previous day.

And this time it was the forehead of the Princess he would kiss before parting with his pearl.

"'Tis a big price to pay," said the Princess, "and yet you said your pearl was not for sale; however, I shall pay for it," and cautiously looking round to make sure she was unobserved, she let the poor Pilgrim kiss her, and hastened away with the pearl to the Palace.

When the third evening approached the Princess found herself looking out for the poor Pilgrim, but it grew dark and she longed for his coming before he arrived. Who was he? The Princess felt sure he was not the poor Pilgrim he professed to be—here was a riddle she could not solve! And why did she long for his coming?

Ah me! She was unhappy. She wished she were a poor pilgrim girl and could wander about the world with the Pilgrim at her side.

But there he was at the foot of her tower, with a great white light in his hand.

Down the rope ladder she climbed, and taking the Pilgrim by the hand, she led him to her father.

They supped together, the Princess, the King and the Pilgrim, by the light of the great white pearl.

At the end of the meal the Princess would have the pearl, offering half her kingdom for it.

But the pearl was not for sale, though it could be got for the asking, on condition the Princess let the Pilgrim kiss her on her heart.

When he had sold his pearls for three kisses the Rajah's son left Ceylon.

And the Princess from her tower waited and watched at dusk for the poor Pilgrim in vain.

After many days as the Princess looked out from her tower, she saw a larger fleet of beautiful ships than ever she had seen before, enter the harbour.

And soon news was brought to the Palace that a Rajah's son was on his way to try his luck with the Riddle Princess, for he knew of a riddle she would not solve.

And the Princess waited his coming, sad that so many brave princes should lose their lives for her. The Riddle Princess had learnt to think of others in the lonely hours she spent at dusk on her tower, waiting and watching for the poor Pilgrim who never came.

At length the Rajah's son reached the Palace, accompanied by his father the Rajah of Rajputana.

"Beautiful Princess," he said, "this is my riddle, solve it if you will."

"I was out hunting in a strange land when a beautiful antlered deer came into sight; carefully aiming at its feet I fired, but it ran wounded away."

"The next day on the same spot I caught sight of the same beautiful animal, and fired, this time aiming at its forehead. It fell, but when I approached, it darted up and disappeared. For the third time on the third day I found the deer at the same spot, and shot it as I thought through the heart. On arriving, however, at the spot where I thought I saw it fall, it was nowhere to be seen. Can you solve the riddle?"

Now the Princess while listening to the riddle guessed that the Rajah's son was no other than her poor Pilgrim. That she guessed more than this you may be sure, but she did not even pretend to try to solve the riddle; but giving it up, she gladly consented to marry the Rajah's son, to the very great delight of the King, the Rajah and their two dear children.

BEVIS:

A Story for very Little Folk.

HE did not know exactly how it happened.

He remembered going down to the beach with his Mummie and his Ayah to pick shells and make sand castles.

There they sat amongst the rocks, and the big and little waves came and played about.

The big waves were always chasing the little waves and taking them back to the sea, but some of them rushed away and hid in the great rock-basins. They pretended each rock-basin was the sea, and they tried to roll and toss in it as the big waves do in the sea, but they could only ripple.

Bevis's Mummie told him he could go and play with the tiny waves and make them chase his toes.

It was then they whispered to him to come with them to their home at the bottom of the sea, and they promised to bring him back again to his Mummie. Then Bevis felt very tired, and he thinks he must have slept.

When he awoke, he could not recognize himself—his little arms had turned into fins and his feet into a fish's tail.

He was quite comfortable, for he lay on the softest and prettiest bed you could imagine.

It was made of green and pink sea-weed, and he had a tiny sponge pillow at his head.

Tiny wee fish floated and swam about everywhere.

Some of them were like little lamps, all luminous inside.

And they lit up the place, which would otherwise have been dark; for it was very early morning, and it takes a long time for the dawn to appear at the bottom of the sea.

There the days are very short and the nights very long.

Bevis was not very happy about the loss of his hands and feet; fins felt so funny, and he had not learnt to use them yet.

But how was he going to eat with only fins to help him?

Well, he knew what he would do if he did not like this place.

He would remind the little waves of their promise to take him back to the beach near his Mummie.

And then he began to cry, for he felt he wanted his Mummie.

Oh! Where were the little waves?

A kind mermaid who lay in another soft bed of sea-weeds heard him, and swam up to him.

"Are you wide awake, little stranger?" she said. "Then come with me and I'll take you to our Mer-Queen. She wants to know all about the land from which you come."

"But perhaps you are hungry; and what do

BEVIS AND THE MERMAIDS.

you have in your own land-home when you are hungry?

Bevis had to learn how to eat, and this is how he did it at the bottom of the sea.

He just kept his mouth open when his food came near enough, and it floated into his mouth and he swallowed it.

But you have fed gold-fish and the fish near the temple at Kandy often and often, I am sure, so you know exactly how he ate his food, don't you?

The Mer-Queen was delighted to have a little boy to talk to, and she told him all the secrets of the deep, in exchange for what Bevis told her about his own home-land.

There were little mer-babies and mer-boys and mer-girls of all ages at the bottom of the sea.

They rode sea horses and romped about and played hide and seek, follow-my-neighbour, and had such a gay time.

Bevis was sorry when the short day was over and they had to go to bed.

* * * *

"Wake up, darling! What a long sleep you've had," said mother, as she lifted her little boy out of his cot the next morning.

"Why! Mummie, I thought I was at the bottom of the sea," said Bevis, "and that I had fins and a tail instead of hands and feet."

"You've got hands and feet now," said Mummie, pinching his tiny wee toes.

"But wake up, little boy, and let's go down to the beach where we can play on the sands."

"And may I send a letter by the waves to my little friends at the bottom of the sea, Mummie? They were so good and kind to me; but Bevis likes being with his Mummie best."

THE END